Working Together:
Social enterprise in Greater Manchester

www.togetherworks.org.uk
Our aim is to develop a strong, independent and business consultancy to mentoring and networking, and a range of support services, ranging from access to environment.

Does your business or organisation exist to help people and/or places.

Social enterprises exist to further a social or environmental goal – that is they exist to help people and/or places.

Introduction

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Our activities include:

- publishing Enterprising magazine, the most important resource for social enterprises in Greater Manchester
- offering training courses for social enterprise business development
- organising networking events to enable social enterprises in Greater Manchester to learn from each other and do business together
- representing the interests of our members and the sector, contributing to policy development at a city, regional and national level
- offering advice and support to social enterprise start-ups and social entrepreneurs

Unlike many business advice and support organisations, Together Works is fully accountable to its membership and any member social enterprise can seek election to its board. It is a co-operative, the members of which are Greater Manchester’s social enterprises, working together to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

We recycle computers. We take them in from companies, households and councils, and we look to re-use them and send them back out into the community. Anything that really doesn’t work we ethically recycle – we have a no-landfill policy. That means waste and toxins are diverted out of the waste stream. We’ve gone out of our way to find some of the best recyclers in the country to work with, but first we try to recondition anything that does work – at the moment mainly for sale back into the community, although we hope to create a 50-50 mix, with some computers going to Africa through our Computer Aid contract. Some computers we sell to help cover our costs, others we give to clients of three charities we work with, the RNIB, Trafford Women’s Aid and the Shaw Trust.

We also provide workplace training within a social enterprise – we’re really proud of that. Students from City College can come on an IT practitioners’ course and learn hands-on how to dismantle and repair PCs – we’re one of only a couple of IT workshops in Manchester that are willing to work with students like that.

All three of us worker-owners come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but now we’re running a project that benefits the community. Recycle-IT’s policies and structures come from us forming it, making our own decisions about what we wanted to happen, with the underlying thought of what can benefit the community.

We charge a fee for our WEEE-regulated collection service. We use a sliding scale and profile the organisations and cost accordingly, so big companies will pay the full price and charities, say, won’t pay as much. With customers buying reconditioned computers, we try and keep the cost as low as possible and still cover our costs. At the moment we’re keeping our heads above water and covering the costs – of the unit and licenses and so on. But generating enough to cover a proper payroll is difficult, enough to actually pay ourselves instead of working mainly as volunteers.

Getting our licenses in place has been a challenge too – the paperwork we have to have from the Environment Agency. It was very disorienting, contacting them and trying to get help and advice with the codes and paperwork we need. We got some help with signposting, but it was still very difficult, but we have everything in place now.

It’s all been a really steep learning curve over the last two years, but hopefully we’re starting to turn the corner. We know more than we did a year ago about what help is out there and how to access it. Together Works has given us a mentor who used to run a recycling firm himself and is ideally placed to help us; I feel like I can ring him up whenever I need advice. I hope that as we grow we’ll be able to help other organisations, maybe even run workshops ourselves to feed back some of the things we’ve been through, and put that into the pot of social enterprise knowledge. Taking over a legacy company meant we’d worked for the business for four years but none of us had ever run one. It was a difficult transition but we’re coming through it and things are picking up.
We’re not just waving pom-poms about! Cheerleading is a real sport. It might not be classed as one, but it is. There’s a saying that ‘cheerleaders lift athletes’ – we’re not just lifting a ball or a racket, we’re lifting each other so you’ve got to be really strong, as well as disciplined and flexible.

Health is the main reason behind what we do. There are lots of physical benefits to cheerleading, especially the way we deliver it. The girls – all 80 members are girls at the moment, though we used to have some boys and more would be welcome – they have to be so strong to do the lifting. They learn about core stability and getting their stomach muscles really strong. They have to learn to be flexible – they love that. They’re always wanting to learn how to do the splits, and once they can do it they’re always showing off.

And those two minutes during a routine are really hard work, so they have to have cardiovascular fitness and endurance. There are benefits to the girls’ self-esteem as well. Some of them come for their first time and they’re so shy, but a couple of weeks later they’re showing off, performing in the middle on their own. The improvement in their confidence is so good to see.

The children in the squad pay for their sessions, and that money goes towards the teaching and room hire. Then we have to do fundraising on top of that to pay for extras like uniforms, entry fees and other competition costs like coaches and accommodation.

In 2009 we qualified for the European cheerleading championships in Sweden so we had to find a way to pay for flights, accommodation and all sorts. When I got the news I thought, we’re definitely not going to be able to go, we can’t raise that kind of money. But the children all pulled together, even the ones who weren’t going to Sweden. They sold football cards and packed bags in the supermarket and all kind of things to raise the funds. Even the ones in the squad were saying at one point, we’re not going to be able to raise enough money. But they did!

The squad is really popular, we never have to actively recruit new members – we’re always full through word of mouth, and we’ve got a waiting list. The main thing that’s been a challenge is that although I’ve been self-employed for a long time, there’s quite a difference between running your own accounts and running a company. The next step would be to get more training for the people on the committee, so they can help more with roles like Secretary or Treasurer.

More information: www.manchesterdiamonds.org.uk
Start in Salford provides a range of services for people who are vulnerable or excluded. When people come to us we work with them in the arts, in different media, in horticulture, carpentry, digital photography. Through those media we’re trying to raise people’s aspirations, build their confidence and self-esteem; and find a pathway for them back into the community.

We have a couple of programmes which are specifically focused on mental health. We’ve got an arts on prescription programme for people who are visiting their GP with problems such as anxiety or depression. We run a youth arts project and a 50-plus programme – they’re for the general public and are about health and wellbeing. The youth programme is for people who are not in employment, education, or training so they may be teenage mums, young carers, or in contact with the youth offending team. 50-plus is run in various community centres; we do a year’s worth of activities and after that we help people set up their own groups.

We also have a trading arm which sells our products and we do commissions for markets, shops or galleries or for an art hire and rental service. We also make yurts and other commissions. And we provide qualifications and placements.

The mental health programmes especially work with people who’ve been in the system for a long time. Often they’ve been treated as an illness or a diagnosis so they feel that they can’t contribute to community life. We might get them onto our volunteering pathway, or our education pathway where we help them get to college, work on their portfolio with them. We’ve also got a self-employment and employment pathway, helping people get back into work and linking them up with other agencies that can help. If people want to become self-employed they can get involved with our trading arm - in a way we’re using this as an incubation area. But you’ll always have people who are too old or too unwell, who’ll only ever want to go into a leisure pathway, so we have user-led groups here to maintain their health and wellbeing.

The funding situation is always a challenge. We’ve had a bit of a traumatic twelve months here: we intended for the trading arm to have its own building, so we put in for several bids, but unfortunately our finance manager died suddenly. We had to sit down as a team and decide whether this was the time to take on a loan, in the middle of a recession and when we’d just lost our financial director.

We’ve been operational since 1993 and we’ve grown a lot, because back then it was just me working from the back of a car, delivering services in people’s houses. We knew that grant funding sources would dry up and funders are of a mind that you need to be self-sustaining. We’re lucky at the moment, we have contracts with the PCT to deliver services, but we’ve got to expand and do more for our clients.

The social enterprise model suited us because it’s about our ethos and the benefits we bring to our client group. We don’t want to live on grants. They’re good for setting up new projects, but we aim to be self-sustaining so that we can be a bit more creative and perhaps start supporting clients in setting up mini social enterprises, so they are still making a living, they’re off benefits, they’re contributing to society. If there aren’t jobs out there for them we have to think of other ways to get them where we want them to be – more healthy, more able to manage their own lifestyle.

More information: www.startinsalford.org.uk
FC United of Manchester

Andy Walsh

Industrial & Provident Society

FC United are a non-league football club. We were established in 2005 when the Glazers took over at Old Trafford. When we were formed, we decided that we wanted to be different in the way we organised, making sure our focus was very much on the community. All too often football clubs refer to themselves as community organisations, but they don’t demonstrate that in the way they operate.

But for us, community is central to what we do. It’s not just about the community of our fans, making sure they’re looked after with cheap ticket prices and input into the way the club is run. It’s also about working with organisations in our area – schools, colleges, junior football clubs, tenants’ & residents’ associations. We look at what their needs are and whether we can meet them. For example, we don’t run junior football clubs because there are lots of good ones across Greater Manchester. So we work with those that already exist to improve their capacity.

We’ve also worked with different ethnic groups in Greater Manchester, especially refugee groups, and we’ve used our community cohesion strategy to try and integrate the most vulnerable immigrant communities into the wider fabric of the city. Our supporters organise games against different refugee groups, helping them form teams and organise matches as a way of socialising – with each other, but also with people from other backgrounds.

And community cohesion, for us, it’s not just about immigrant communities, it’s about local people working together and living together, so we’ve worked with local authorities, police and housing associations on various estates to tackle anti-social behaviour. On one estate in Audenshaw, we went in and helped organise some of the young lads into a football team. Now they’re playing in the league and anti-social disturbances are down by 73%.

We do a lot of work looking at how we can help other social enterprises and community owned businesses in Greater Manchester. We want to work with other organisations that share our values and ethos. It’s a natural way for us to go, and it’s part of being a social enterprise. It’s political as well – telling people that society can be organised in a different way. We’re happy to take on that challenge; sometimes it’s actually easier to be working with other social enterprises and co-operatives that understand our values instinctively, so we can all benefit from that way of working.

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More information: www.fc-utd.co.uk
The Victoria Baths Trust was set up by the Friends of Victoria Baths to preserve and restore these Edwardian public baths in Rusholme and re-open them for public use. We are now on the way to restoring the building with the help of our funders, and looking forward to future public use of it. We’re in the process of completing Phase 1, using the money we won in the BBC’s Restoration series in 2003 which has paid for the renovation of the front block. The bottom line is that we’d like to open some of the facilities again for public use. The Turkish Baths are more likely to be open before the pools because of problems with the structure of the pool halls. There are 3 pools and it would be nice to think we could get two of them operational because the female pool, the smallest of the three, has a lot of its original features and is of a size which would make it very useful as a training pool and for uses like women-only sessions which would serve the Asian community here. We’ve also had interest from the hospital looking for extra hydrotherapy facilities, so again that might come into play.

At the moment, the building’s being used for open days and tours, and it’s also being used as an arts venue quite extensively. There’s a lot of demand as an arts venue; we’ve had colleges from as far away as Preston using it. And the open days are being extended to have a series of vintage fairs throughout the year.

We run sessions with schools in the neighbourhood and a lot of primary schools use the facilities for extra-mural activities. There is a lot of social history written into the fabric of this building. But the difficulty is that it has no space heating, so it is difficult to run events in the winter months. We are looking into that and certainly one of the issues that is close to my heart is finding a way to heat the building that is in keeping with the architecture but also uses the latest in green energy.

We have had a lot of support from English Heritage over the years and Manchester City Council, which still owns the building, are supportive but have also looked to the market for developers to come in. My personal view is that it would be good to keep as much of the whole site as possible, because not only is it one of the foremost example of municipal baths of its era, but also it is perhaps the most complete site with the boiler rooms and laundry house still there, and the laundry house could also be used for public use – as a gallery space perhaps, or a cafe.

We’re trying to move away from the grant funded position we’re in at the moment. We’d like to develop the building as a heritage visitor attraction in its own right and get the Turkish Baths operational. That might involve perhaps changing the nature of the Trust or working in tandem with an operator, but we would wish that would be a social enterprise, a not-for-profit... whether we ourselves morph into that operational trust ourselves is debatable. It’s something we’re considering but we’re not there yet... We’re also hoping to expand the volunteer base and see the building used more, not only as a heritage visitor attraction as it is now but offering health and leisure facilities like the Turkish Baths.

More information: www.victoriabaths.org.uk
Together Works is the social enterprise network for Greater Manchester

Benefit from:

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- Peer to Peer mentoring
- Publicity in Enterprising magazine
- Online members directory
- Funding and Contract alerts
- Income diversification
- Business support
- Consortia development
- Trade Fairs, and more...

Join Together Works and help us develop the social economy across Greater Manchester and the North West

www.togetherworks.org.uk